destroying the thread of calm
she held.

You judge a woman
by what she can do for you alone
but there's no need
for slaves to have slaves.

You judge a woman
by impressions you think you've made.
Ask and she gives,
take without asking,
beat on her and she'll obey,
throw her name up and down the streets
like some loose whistle—
knowing her neighbors will talk.
Her friends will chew her name.
Her family's blood will run loose
like a broken creek.
And when you're gone,
a woman is left
healing her wounds alone.

But we so-called men,
we so-called brothers
wonder why it's so hard
to love *our* women
when we're about loving them
the way america
loves us.

GARDENIAS

Another station, a new town.
The same COLORED and
WHITE ONLY signs.
By now I shouldn't really care
but it amazes me still.

Every town since St. Louis
has been mean and nasty.
Signs everywhere,
and in some places
whorehouses
for COLORED ONLY
but no proper places
where a lady can pee.

Tonight, once again
I tie my hair up
with gardenias.
I blacken my face
and set myself afire
singing for my man.

Where O where
can he be, can he be?
Out looking for a place
without signs,
somewhere better
than New York